

Don't Let Superstition Have Power Over You

We live in the 21st century, but every Oct. 31 Americans unknowingly return to their medieval roots. Halloween can be traced to ancient Ireland, where people believed that the spirits of the dead roamed the earth on the last day of October.

The ancient Celtic people carved out turnips and put candles inside them to ward off ghosts and demons. Today, our methods are more glamorous—and expensive. America will spend \$8 billion on Halloween—with \$2.5 billion of that on costumes alone. We will also spend \$30 million on costumes for pets—and millions more on candy and pumpkins.

And all this started with superstition.

Some superstitions are harmless lies invented by ignorant people. When I was a boy living in Alabama, some friends told me that if I ate a watermelon seed, a watermelon would grow in my stomach. It was a Southern folk legend that created fear in me until I realized it wasn't true.

Some people I know grew up believing it is bad luck if they break a mirror. Others refused to step on a crack in the sidewalk for fear that this will bring bad luck. There are people who believe the sight of an ambulance is an evil omen.

And anyone who ever watched the movie *The Ring* might be tempted to believe that if you watch television in a dark room at night, a creepy, dark-haired girl might crawl out of the screen! Superstition breeds fear, and fear has the power to control.

Do you have any superstitions that you need to renounce? Here are a few of the most common superstitions in our culture

today:

1. Friday the 13th. The movie franchise with the same name was about a masked murderer named Jason who killed teenagers on the fated Friday. That could be one reason why there is actually a clinical name for fear of Friday the 13th. It's called *triskaidekaphobia*. But the idea that Friday the 13th is bad luck developed centuries ago.

Ancient Romans believed witches gathered in covens of 12, and that the devil was the 13th person present. Early Christians associated 13 with Judas. Fear of the number 13 is so common in our culture that people avoid traveling on Friday the 13th, and some airlines don't have the 13th row on planes because so many superstitious people don't want to sit there.

2. Black cats. Legend says you will have bad luck if you see a black cat or if one passes in front of you. The notion is rooted in a medieval idea that witches could transform themselves into cats. It sounds crazy, but the fact remains that black cats, as well as black dogs, are least likely to be adopted from animal shelters because people today still fear them.

3. Horoscopes. For centuries, people in various cultures have believed the movement of the planets and stars control their destiny. Astrology is big business around the world. In mega-superstitious Italy, for example, people spend more than \$5.5 billion annually on horoscopes. A 2009 Harris Poll showed that 26 percent of Americans believe in astrology, and 21 percent of those horoscope watchers described themselves as born-again Christians.

Astrology is also huge in China, where one-third of its people say astrology is an absolute science. In some Chinese companies, applicants are sometimes hired or denied jobs because of their zodiac signs.

4. Chain letters. Back in the day, people mailed silly notes

demanding that the reader must mail multiple copies to friends. The opening line usually said: "You will have amazing luck this week if you send this letter to 200 people by Friday." The letter promised good luck to those who complied, and bad luck to disbelievers who threw it away.

Nowadays, the practice has been resurrected on social media. Have you ever forwarded a message on Facebook simply because the sender threatened bad luck if you didn't post his message? If you reposted, you were acting out of superstition.

5. A rabbit's foot. In medieval times people believed that if you could sever the left hind foot of a rabbit that had been shot in a cemetery on the night of a full moon, you would have good luck. Huh? That crazy notion is why rabbit's foot key chains are so popular today. If you think having a rabbit's foot will help you find the right mate, the best job or more money, you are guilty of idolatry.

Do you hold any superstitious ideas? The Bible tells us clearly that if we give our lives to Christ, He protects us and guides us. We do not have to fear the devil, demons, animals or inanimate objects around us. We can say: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom will I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom will I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1). God wants you to have a life free from fear.

We do not have to perform rituals to get good luck or to avoid bad luck. We don't need animal parts, icons, crucifixes, salt, sand, clovers, lucky charms or bone fragments to bring us luck. We don't put our trust in the stars, the moon or planets to show us what to do. If we know and serve God, we look to Him alone for His blessings and guidance.

If you realize you have been a slave to superstitious fears, renounce them today, throw away any objects associated with your superstition and declare your full allegiance to Christ.

You can pray something like this:

"Father, I acknowledge that You are the only true God. I put my trust in You alone. You paid for my salvation with the blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ. I am no longer a slave to fear. I renounce these superstitions in Jesus' name, and I ask You to break the power of fear and tradition off of my life. You are my shield and my defender, and the devil cannot touch me because my life is hidden in You. Amen." {eo2}